400 year ‘wait’ for new bed at Little Moreton Hall

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A replica Tudor-style tester bed, with a massive solid oak frame, spectacular red woollen canopy and red and blue drapes, has been installed at Little Moreton Hall, near Congleton.

The project to build and install the bed has been supported, as part of a wider heritage project, with part of a £50,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The project will bring Little Moreton Hall to life and provide visitors with more information about life in Tudor times.

Daphne Mayer, Visitor Experience Officer at the hall, said: "The main attraction here is the building itself, with its famous long gallery and crazily uneven floors. The sparse furnishing allows visitors to appreciate the hall’s structure and how it was built. But we also aim to give people a clear picture of what it was like to live here. We felt that having the correct type of bed in the South Chamber on the first floor of the South Range will add a great deal to the visitor experience at Little Moreton Hall.

"This bed is not going to be kept behind ropes. Visitors will be able to touch it and explore the four poster framework and the bedding. They will notice that it is shorter than modern beds - almost square, in fact. Its pillows are propped up by a large bolster. Both of those features result from the fact that in Tudor times people slept in a ‘sitting up’ position. The fear was that if you lay down the devil might believe you were dead and steal your soul!

The bed has a feather mattress, with a straw mattress underneath, and they are both supported on ropes stretched across the framework. Those ropes need regular tightening to maintain comfort. That is what led to the expression ‘sleep tight’. Underneath the tester bed is a smaller truckle bed. That was pulled out at night and used by a servant who slept in the same room. The drapes on the larger bed provided some privacy."

The Little Moreton Hall bed was constructed by David Blake, who built the framework and Pam Livingstone-Lawn, who designed and made the drapes and bedding. Pam said: "We really enjoyed the project. We made sure that everything is authentic and strong enough to stand up to plenty of wear and tear. It was particularly interesting for me because I had not stitched bed-hangings before, although I had made wall-hangings.

"The tester bed is so big that we had to wait until we went to Little Moreton Hall to put it all together. Until then, we had not seen the complete article, so that made the final construction work quite exciting.

Little Moreton Hall is currently open on Saturdays and Sundays 11am – 4pm until 22 December with a full programme of Christmas activities. The new bed will also be on display.

The wider HLF-funded heritage project includes:

- a group of volunteers will continue to carry out research on the Hall and Tudor life to guide future interpretation and events;
- introducing fabrics, contents and furniture into the hall to give visitors an understanding of Tudor life in the hall;
- improved access and interpretation through the use of digital media, including a new virtual tour using portable devices;

- designing exhibition panels to tell the story of the building of the hall and of the skilled craftsmen who built it;
- a programme of activities each year, focusing on key Tudor festivals such as Midsummer, Michaelmas, May Day, Lammas and Hallowtide;
- training for staff and volunteers in the research and recreation of these events and opportunities for family volunteering to assist with the programme;
- a new series of guided tours and short talks to reflect new themes and stories such as the Moreton family and Tudor life.

Notes to editors

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Further information

Daphne Mayer on 01260 272018, email: Daphne.Mayer@nationaltrust.org.uk.

Laura Bates, 020 7591 6027, email: lbates@hlf.org.uk.